

“Paul, Called To Be An Apostle ...”

“... of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes, our brother ...” 1 Cor. 1:1).

In nine of his thirteen epistles, Paul asserts his apostleship: sometimes merely identifying himself as such (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus); sometimes, as in the case of this letter, affirming he was an apostle *“by (or through) the will of God”* (letters to Ephesus, Colossae, and Corinth); once that he was an apostle, separated unto the gospel (Rm. 1:1f) with the strongest assertion of apostleship in his letter to the Galatian Christians: *“Paul, an apostle (not from man, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father)”* (Gal. 1:1).

There can be no doubt that Paul was an apostle in every sense of the word. He was *“called”* to that position and his longtime friend and companion, Luke, records in his Acts, three different times in which that call took place (Acts 9, 22, 26). In all these accounts it is clearly set forth that it was God who initiated Paul’s becoming an apostle. The last thing on Saul’s mind when he left Jerusalem with letters from the high priest to bring Christians from Damascus back to Jerusalem *“in bonds to be punished”* was that he should conclude that journey, no longer as the chief persecutor of Christ, but rather the one who would become Christ’s most ardent defender! It was that call from God which turned Saul’s world *“upside down”* and reversed the course of his life.

Paul’s call was, as he viewed it (and rightly so), an act of God’s grace: *“... if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace which was given me to you ward”* (Eph. 3:1). Paul was humbled and subdued by that grace. *“I thank him that enabled me, even Christ Jesus our Lord, for that he counted me faith, appointing me to his service,”* saying again, *“I am not meet to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God”* (1 Tim. 1:12f; 1 Cor. 15:9).

But God’s gift of apostleship to Saul was destined to bring hardship, suffering; even death as its final stroke. To a reluctant Ananais, who expressed reservation about going to the *“street called Straight and inquire in the house of Judas for a man named Saul, a man of Tarsus,”* God would allow no disobedience. *“Go thy way, for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel for I will show him how many things he must suffer for my name’s sake”* (Acts 9:11, 15). What an admirable spirit reposed in the breast of this man of

God, a spirit that would regard it grace, a gift, to be able to suffer for the name of Jesus Christ.

Even today the good wrought through this apostle continues. His letters constitute our major source of reference for almost all aspects of the faith of Jesus. And, as we study this letter to the Corinthians, it should never be far from our mind that his instructions continue to be a vital factor in the health and spiritual status of the Church of Jesus in this 21st century A.D.

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